The Catalyst

Volume 4 | Issue 1 Article 4

2017

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Cicero characterized his fellow countrymen's striving for honor thusly: "By nature we yearn and hunger for honor, and once we have glimpsed, as it were, some part of its radiance, there is nothing we are not prepared to bear and suffer in order to secure it" (Barton, 37). Julius Caesar is recorded as having justified his crossing of the Rubicon to his legions—an act which threw the Roman Republic into a civil war which would cost thousands of lives—by telling them that his opponents in Rome had degraded his rank and offended against his honor, something which all Romans would have understood was not only a personal offence but a political one as well (Holland, 247). Several hundred years before Gaius Julius Caesar justified invading Rome as necessary to preserve his honor, another Roman general named Gaius did the same thing in retribution for an offense against his honor and rank and his subsequent exile from the city (Plutarch). Originally named Gaius Marcius, this general would be immortalized by Shakespeare in the Bard's great tragedy Coriolanus. Along with their shared name these generals also had in common the fact that they were willing to destroy Rome in pursuit of honor, or at least in pursuit of the Roman conception of honor.

In Coriolanus one of the greatest contrasts between concepts of honor is observed and explored: the difference between the concept of honor before and after Christianity became the dominant cultural force in the Western world. Indeed Coriolanus can be read as a critique of the classical Roman conception of honor—a concept Shakespeare would have been aware of along with his apparently extensive knowledge of his play's Roman source material (Jonson's little quip aside)—which focuses not on morality or virtue but instead on social rank and prestige, or, in a word, classism.

"Consequently, an important aspect of the play is the implied superiority of the English, Christian conception of honor."

The underlying theme of Coriolanus is the failure of the Roman concept of honor. Shakespeare uses the tragic main character of Coriolanus to illustrate the flaws and faults in Roman honor, flaws and faults which lead to Coriolanus's downfall in the latter half of the play. Importantly, these perceived flaws were largely fixed by the moralized, Christianized version of honor which was prevalent in Shakespeare's England (Watson 1960, 3). Consequently, an important aspect of the play is the implied superiority of the English, Christian conception of honor. The superiority of this English Christian construction is implied throughout the play when Coriolanus makes poor choices because of his strict adherence to this conception of Roman honor and can also be seen by comparing Coriolanus to the English Christian heroes of some of Shakespeare's other plays, such as Henry V. This English Christian understanding of honor is also shown as triumphant when Coriolanus is moved to spare Rome, an act which makes no sense in the context of the Roman system of honor.

There are several crucial terms and background items necessary to demonstrate that Coriolanus is a play which functions as a critique of Roman honor and as an implicit celebration of the superiority of the English national and religious concept of honor, and so the first half of this paper will be spent discussing the concept of Roman honor, the concept of Christian honor as developed during the English Renaissance, and how these two concepts of honor were quite distinct from each other. After this has been accomplished the paper will use examples from the play to examine the character of Coriolanus and how this character and his actions function as a critique by Shakespeare of the ruthless and vainglorious philosophy which constituted Roman honor, a conception of honor which was quite at odds with the central tenets of the Christian faith in sixteenth century England (and with our understanding of honor as a concept today).

"In Roman society the most basic way to gain honor was through the martial means of warfare and combat."

The historical concept of honor in the Western world can broadly be divided into two categories: pre-Christianity and post-Christianity. Prior to the advent of Christianity, honor in the West was a derivative almost exclusively of the Greco-Roman tradition. When Christianity arrived on the world stage and became the dominant political, moral, and cultural force in Western civilization, the concept of honor as it was conceived by the Greco-Romans experienced a change, being modified from what writers such as Robert Kaplan have termed a "pagan ethic" into a virtuous quality more in line with the moral instructions of Christ and his Apostles (Kaplan, 6). This transformation of honor from a pagan ethic into a Christian virtue was by no means seamless and certainly led to some cognitive dissonance.

Roman honor is a subject which has a rich history of exploration and scholarly discussion. There are several scholarly definitions of Roman honor, all of which are effectively variations on the same theme. Recently Carlin Barton has emerged as a recognized authority as a historian and writer on Roman honor, both critiquing and expounding on the work of previous historians such as J.E. Lendon and Michael Peachin. Her book Roman Honor: Fire in the Bones offered the definition of Roman honor as "'face,' which was understood as both the public role you maintained and the credit you received for maintaining it" (Barton, 17). This leads to the conclusion by Barton that for a Roman "to lose your 'face' was to lose your 'soul,'" as the loss of honor was a devastating event which had the potential to ostracize a Roman from the social and political square (Barton, 17).

Gaining honor was largely done by gaining glory, and was functionally a zero-sum game. Glory was a finite resource, so for one man to gain glory and honor meant that another man had to lose them. This competitive conception of honor helped to maintain a state in which humility was disparaged and pride ruled; consequently, Coriolanus himself should not be seen as an exception to the Roman honor system but rather the rule. Nathan Rosenstein, the Chair of the Department of History at Ohio State and an expert on both ancient warfare and the Late Roman Republic and Early Imperium, has written that

"For any aristocrat what matter most are honor, rank, and preeminence among his or her peers, and for the aristocracy of the Roman Republic these derived almost exclusively from action on behalf of their community.... that ethos was highly martial. Courage on the battlefield brought glory, praise, and renown and these in turn were the foundation for a political career...[one] could not hope to compete for public office without having first proven himself on the battlefield" (Rosenstein, 133).

In short Rome was always expanding and constantly at war, and consequently in Roman society the most basic way to gain honor—and not just basic, but required for any Roman who wanted to gain the respect, admiration, and support of his fellows—was through the martial means of warfare and combat.

This is the means through which Coriolanus first gained his honor, first made his name, and first firmly established his rank in the hierarchical society that was the patrician upper-class of Rome. Starting as a low-ranking soldier

Coriolanus rapidly ascends both the military ladder of command and the societal ladder of honor, and each military victory rebounds to credit to him and his face in Roman society, as the consul Cominius reminds the Romans and the reader in his long speech in Act 2. One of the ways in which Coriolanus's stock of honor is expressed is through his wounds, which take on a heavy amount of importance throughout the play. The numbers of wounds which Coriolanus suffers are not in and of themselves honorable—there is no inherent honor in being wounded—but rather it is what they represent, the courage and glory of Coriolanus himself, which is both quite honorable and quite important to the Romans.

It is also important here to note that in Rome virtue (in the sense of morality and as opposed to virtus, a specific virtue related to martial ardor, manliness, courage, and excellence and is at times used as a synonym for honor itself) was seen as subordinate to honor. As Cominius says in his long monologue praising Coriolanus, "It is held/ That valor is the chiefest virtue, and/Most dignifies the haver" (Coriolanus, 2.2.83-85). Valor is an almost purely martial virtue, and Shakespeare having Cominius praising it as the chief and most dignified virtue is a vivid reminder that in Rome the things which Christians in England thought of as virtues were not seen in the same light in ancient Rome, and instead the "chiefest virtue" was being brave and good at killing people. It was good to be good, but not necessary, and if one could win or was forced to defend their rank or honor without being morally good that was not seen as a real negative. An example of this is Caesar rebelling against the state: the action of rebelling was not morally upright, but because he was defending his own honor and rank in society his rebellion was both honorable and an example of virtus in action.

Another example of this idea is Antony, whose extravagant lifestyle while living in Egypt was seen as being unmanly and unbecoming not because he was cheating on his wife or living immorally, but because it was seen as making him soft and hurting his ability to fight and win on the battlefield (Chernaik, 148). If, like the Greek solider and statesman Alcibiades (a figure often held up for admiration because of his overall pursuit of excellence, his oratorical ability, and his martial skill by Roman leaders and by writers such as Plutarch) a Roman was able to reconcile his debauchery with fighting skill and strategic ability, that immorality was seen as no slight on his honor. The glorification of self-restraint and discipline is widely seen as distinctly Roman in large part due not to its inherency, but instead in large part because of the character of the individual who best personified those attributes in Roman history, the deified Augustus Caesar, and who attempted to impose them on Roman society as a whole during the Augustan moral reforms. It is also worth noting that the single best exemplar of virtus and honor for both the Romans and Greeks was the character of Achilles in Homer's Iliad. Achilles sleeps around with various women, butchers his enemies brutally, and is an incredibly proud character with no traces of humility, preferring to allow his friends and allies to be slaughtered before the gates of Troy rather than suffer any dishonor or sacrifice his own pride. On the other hand Achilles obviously would not be seen as the exemplar of honor for a Christian. Once Christianity became the dominant religious—and perhaps more importantly the dominant cultural—force in the Roman Empire these morally ambiguous at best martial attributes were devalued (a devaluation which scholars like Edward Gibbon would later blame for the decline and fall of the Roman Empire). Instead with the rise of Christianity values like peacefulness, charity, mercy, and a regard for the poor were emphasized as being the noblest and most honorable. Of course these values are not bad and might

even be inherently good; however, they stand in stark contrast to the Roman values listed above and especially to the Roman conception of honor.

In short, Roman honor was concerned with two main things: maintaining face or rank in society, and demonstrating virtue and power in warfare. Things like self-restraint and discipline were important, but paled in comparison to these two primary attributes. Christianity, on the other hand, has long had a focus on concepts like mercy, grace, and spirituality. Thus it can clearly be seen why there might be a conflict between the peaceful and eternal (as opposed to temporal) focus of Christianity and the terrestrial and martial focus of Roman honor.

Christian honor, as the construction of honor in the English Renaissance can be characterized, attempted to reconcile these two seemingly irreconcilable concepts in a coherent and well-ordered way. In the words of one scholar the English Renaissance both "rediscovered and revitalized certain earlier ethical formulations dealing with honor and related concepts" (Watson, 2) in a way that aligned these ethical formulations with Christian ethics and theology. The most simplistic way to characterize how this was done is to say that it was effected by reconciling what had before existed as independent concepts: virtue and honor. As Professor Curtis Watson bluntly puts it in the introduction to his excellent book on the subject of Renaissance honor, "Honor, indeed, was [now] often considered inseparable from virtue itself" (Watson 1960, 3).

This cognitive dissonance between honor and Christian virtue, and honor as a Christian virtue, was illustrated especially well during the English Renaissance, a historical period which was largely characterized by "a fusion of classical wisdom and Christian faith" (Panigrahi, 27). Fusing a concept like Roman honor, with its focus on social rank, pride, glory, and, in the words of Cicero, the "approbation of one's countrymen," with Christianity and its focus on humility, meekness, and prudence, led to some difficulties (Watson 1960, 26).

At its best then the successful solution appears to have been taking the Roman conception of honor, with its focus on social rank and glory, and trying to temper it with humility, kindness, and prudence (three things which the Romans as a society placed relatively little value on). When this mixture went well it worked out beautifully, with the best Shakespearean example of what this Christian honor looked like being the character of King Henry V, a King who desires glory and fame but also ascribes his fortune to God and treats his peers and those below him well, in contrast to the protagonist of Coriolanus. When this mixture of Roman and *English Christian did not work out, however, the results were hypocritically comical, with one historian writing that an observer in Renaissance England might

"find [a gentleman] fighting a duel on Friday (in response to the call of honor and the imperative need to defend himself against any insult), and confessing his sins in church on the following Sunday, one of which sins had been his shedding of human blood in a private quarrel" (Watson 1960, 5).

Indeed popular English Renaissance writers such as Vicentio Saviolo wrote treatises on just what constituted honorable or dishonorable duels, and gave guidelines and advice for how to fight them (Saviolo). The prideful need to defend oneself against any insult and to take any actions necessary to save face—up to and including violence—is a hallmark of the classical Roman conception of honor.

*I say English Christian here because while the baseline of honor stemming from a mixture of Christianity and Roman honor was fairly consistent in Western Christendom, there were significant variations between the conception of honor in England, France, Spain, and so forth, variations which unfortunately are beyond the scope of this paper to explore.

In Coriolanus, the titular character is driven throughout most of the play by the classic Roman honor, the need to achieve martial greatness and maintain a healthy sense of virtus, as well as an intense desire to maintain his rank and his face. However, in the climax of the play, when Coriolanus yields to the pleadings of his mother, wife, and son to spare Rome he sacrifices his Roman sense of honor—which would have demanded that he sack the city and execute his opponents as Julius Caesar and his supporters later would do—for a Christian sense of honor, displaying mercy and grace by sparing the city in a display not of virtus but instead of virtue.

"In his first speech of the play Caius Martius lays out his philosophy for how he treats not only the plebeians but everyone whom he interacts"

Two primary examples demonstrate this juxtaposition of these different conceptions of honor and how they remain in conflict throughout the play: Coriolanus and his treatment of the plebeians and Coriolanus sparing the city of Rome, an event which can be seen as a tragic triumph of Renaissance English Christian honor. The treatment of the commoners and others who possessed less honor in Roman society than Coriolanus is an example of the fallible nature of Roman honor, which leaves no room for humility in front of your lessers. Consequently Coriolanus—acting throughout in an honorable, if prideful, way—is eventually destroyed by his own keen sense of honor in the most Roman conception of that term.

Coriolanus, in his interactions with the common people, is at no point dishonorable in a Roman sense of the term. If anything his interaction with them might be too honorable. In his first speech of the play Caius Martius lays out his philosophy for how he treats not only the plebeians—though this affects them the most—but everyone whom he interacts with throughout the course of the play. He starts by telling the assembled people "He that will give good words to thee will flatter/ Beneath abhorring..." (Coriolanus 1.1.165-166), explicitly making it clear that he has no interest in engaging in politics with them, but will instead speak his mind clearly. This is an example of Roman honor untempered by any Christian concepts. This pride-filled speech, it is important to note, is not honorable because Coriolanus is refusing to lie, but rather because he is refusing to debase himself in flattering the commons. They are beneath him on the Roman social hierarchy, and so to preserve his own rank and face Coriolanus logically deduces that he should refuse to humble himself in any way but instead maintain his proud—yet, by Roman standards, quite honorable—demeanor.

In this same speech the soon-to-be Coriolanus goes on to expound on just that point. When he declares that "Your virtue is/To make him worthy whose offense subdues him/And curse that justice did it. Who deserve greatness/ Deserves your hate" (Coriolanus 1.1.173-175, emphasis mine) he is not referring to virtue in the Christian sense but from a Roman. It is not that the plebeians are not good people, but instead that they are not worthy or entitled to the power that they have (i.e. the recently granted representation by the Tribunes) and their only virtue is to drag down those who are more worthy than they, and so higher on the social scale. It is also known from this same speech by Coriolanus that they do not care for warfare, so they also have no claim on the virtus which the patricians like Cominius say characterizes a true Roman. If honor and glory are finite resources the plebian crowd Coriolanus is addressing is broke.

"This is honorable in a Roman sense, but not in an English Christian sense"

This first interaction with the plebeians sets the stage for Coriolanus's interactions with the commoners for the entire play. Coriolanus is consistently disdainful of the commoners and clearly has little use for them (unlike Julius Caesar, who both historically and in the Shakespeare pay makes the commoners his power base for his political aspirations). Again, this is honorable in a Roman sense, but not in an English Christian sense. For an example of what Shakespeare sees as an exemplar of English Christian honor of the type which was idealized during the English Renaissance one can look to another of Shakespeare's famous plays, Henry V, and specifically in the celebrated St. Crispin's Day speech given by the King in Act 4. This speech by Henry V will be examined in order to make explicit the contrast between the English Christian conception of honor and the Roman conception of honor, and to reveal the implicit critique of pagan Roman honor which an English Christian theatergoer in the audience at the Globe might have picked up on when watching Coriolanus.

Here in this address to the troops on the eve of battle the very English, very Christian, and very honorable Henry V discusses the glory and honor which he envisions himself and his men winning, and he discusses it at length. However, this speech is also a fantastic display of the humility and kindness of the English King. In fact shortly before Henry gives his speech an observation is made by the Duke of Bedford, one of the English nobles (and not just any noble but the brother to the King himself), that "He is as full of valor as of kindness/Princely in both" (Henry V, 4.3.16-17). It is unimaginable for Coriolanus—or indeed, almost any of Shakespeare's Romans—to have not only their valor but their kindness praised by one of their lieutenants, and it is doubtful that these Romans would want their kindness to be praised. This is because their Roman honor places no weight on humility or kindness, while the Christianized English honor does, and it is this second conception of honor which Shakespeare sees as the superior. The stage is set by Bedford, and King Henry V arrives to address the troops, having already been hailed not for his ferocity alone but for his kindness as well. When the King arrives he speaks of honor as the Romans might, making it seem to be a finite resource, saying that "I would not lose so great a honor/As one man more methinks would share from me" (Henry V, 4.3.32-33). However, this is not done in a prideful way and as the speech continues the reader is left in ambiguity as to whether or not the English do see honor as a finite resource. Regardless of whether or not they do, honor certainly does not seem to be seen in the same petty and zero sum way which the Romans view it. Yes, Henry is saying, men will weep that they were not at Agincourt to share in the honor, and yes, the numbers mean that there will be much honor in victory, but that does not mean that those Englishmen who are not fighting are dishonored by that fact. Henry V is extending charity to those Englishmen still abed, not judging them for not fighting but only wishing that for their own sakes they had been present. This stands in sharp contrast to Coriolanus's attitude towards individuals who do not fight or are not present for the fight, or even are in the midst of fighting—as he does during the battle of Corioles—all of whom he dismisses as worthless and insults ferociously on multiple occasions (for examples of this attitude please see Coriolanus, 1.4.29-39 or Coriolanus 3.1.120-125).

The English Christian Henry V also does something else which is fascinating in comparison with the pagan Roman Coriolanus: he joyously looks forward to one day showing off his wounds and scars from the upcoming Battle of Agincourt to his family and friends once he returns to England, saying that

"He that shall see this day, and live old age/ will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbors/ And say, "Tomorrow is St. Crispian."/Then he will strip his sleeves and show his scars,/ And say, These wounds I had on Crispin's Day." (Henry V, 4.3.45-49).

In this passage, as the emphasis shows, Henry is idolizing the display of wounds. He is saying that he will proudly display the wounds which he has received battling for his county. Even more astoundingly, from the perspective of Roman honor, Henry is abasing himself in front of men who are not on his level of social standing, encouraging them to one day display their wounds as well. This actions and encouragement stands in stark contrast to Coriolanus, who detests the fact that he must show off his wounds, won in a display of individual valor which is in no way inferior to that of Henry. The difference between these two commanders is not in valor but in their separate conceptions of honor. This is because for Coriolanus it is unthinkable for him to sully his honor by debasing himself in front of the commoners; his Roman honor will allow for no sense of humility. For Henry, on the other hand, it is a display of his honor to act humbly and with grace in front of his men, and to elevate them while humbling himself. That fact is punctuated when Henry says that "For he today that sheds his blood with me/Shall be my brother. Be he ne'er so vile,/This day shall gentle his condition" (Henry V, 4.3.62-64), and in a single rhetorical act extends kinship and gentility to the English commoners and yeomanry who comprise the vast bulk of his army. Contrast that to the speech given by Coriolanus to the plebeians in Act 1 and one sees not just two different personalities, but two completely different worldviews and concepts of honor at work.

Even from a merely rhetorical standpoint it is impossible to imagine Coriolanus doing the same thing as Henry does when he refers to his soldiers as his brothers, because again acknowledging any form of equality or brotherhood with your lessors, or acting in humility, is not honorable from a Roman point of view. However, Coriolanus's strict Roman honor conception will lead directly to his downfall, because it has not been tempered with Christian humility as Henry's has been. The interactions that Coriolanus has with the commoners—and with those who are not commoners, but who are also not his social equals—continues in this arrogant and prideful way for almost the entirety of the play and eventually lead to his banishment from the city of Rome and narrow avoidance of a death sentence. The only time that Coriolanus displays humility, grace, and mercy is at almost the very end of the production, when he is given the opportunity to avenge himself on Rome for rejecting him and, under massive pressure from his close friend Menenius, his wife, his son, and his mother, chooses to spare the city instead of sacking it.

Coriolanus, having been exiled, following his proud maintenance of his Roman honor and his refusal to engage in actions which he sees as debasing in front of those who are not on his level on the social scale, flees to the Volscians, whom he crushed in battle in the first act of the play. The Roman general quickly enters into an alliance with his former foes and they place him in charge of half of their forces. In short time the brilliant war leader has crushed the Roman armies and laid bare the path to Rome itself, and he stands encamped before the city and begins preparations to annihilate it. It is under these conditions that his closest friend and his family come out to meet him.

When Menenius first presses Coriolanus to relent he is brusquely cast aside by the former war hero. While he is clearly being rude to his one-time mentor, Coriolanus is again not acting in a way that is inconsistent with Roman standards of honor. Coriolanus is firm in his conviction to burn Rome to the ground and explicit in his reason for doing so, telling the Senator that "Wife, mother, child, I know not. My affairs/Are servanted to others. Though I owe/My revenge properly, my remission lies/In Volscian breasts" (Coriolanus, 5.3.78-80). In other words, everything that Coriolanus once held dear, including his family and the city of Rome itself, pales in comparison to Coriolanus's need to satisfy the demands of his offended honor. He is willing to see his family killed and to ally himself with a once mortal enemy because of his "revenge properly," his need to reassert himself and to satisfy his offended honor, demands that this is the action that he must take. Again, this is Roman honor at work, the same type of honor and need to save face and maintain rank that Caesar told his troops led to him crossing the Rubicon and invading Rome itself.

Here Shakespeare is once more critiquing this inflexible Roman honor, which refuses to exercise the humility and grace that the honor of his Christian English heroes like Henry V are able to exercise. The climax of the play, however, allows Coriolanus to reject this strict honor culture and to exercise honor as the English Renaissance envisioned it, by sparing Rome and having mercy on his family and his homeland. Coriolanus does this by consciously putting others who are below him in social status ahead of himself in Act 5, Scene 3. In his long speech greeting the approach of his family outside of Rome Coriolanus says "My wife comes foremost; then the honored mold/Wherein this trunk was framed" (Coriolanus, 5.3.22-23). These lines do not merely refer to the order in

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which his family is approaching him, but also to how Coriolanus is reordering his place in the structured and hierarchal Roman social honor system.

With a startling suddenness we see Coriolanus placing his wife "foremost," and as his decision will soon make clear he is placing her life above his honor. This is revolutionary, because the idea that the needs of the wife—or even the life of the wife—should come before the needs or honor of the husband is definitely not Roman. In fact it is distinctly Christian, stretching back to the Epistles of the apostle Paul. In both Corinthians and Ephesians Paul outlines the responsibilities of the Christian husband, which explicitly include putting his wife and her needs above himself and being willing to lay down his own life for hers. That is exactly what Coriolanus is doing in this scene: setting aside his own honor (and shortly upon his return to Corioles, his own life) for his wife. By having Coriolanus place his wife above himself Shakespeare is critiquing Roman honor and its strict hierarchical system and demonstrating the superiority of Christian honor; one conception of honor destroys not only country but family out of vindictiveness and spite, while the other is merciful and puts family and country ahead of oneself, even if oneself has been legitimately been wronged.

The fact that this is an English Christian honor paradigm which Coriolanus is now using is further reinforced by Volumnia's speech in this scene, where she tears into her son for his conduct and for leading this army against Rome (which is bemusing, since Volumnia is such a clear

product and supporter of the Roman honor system which would sanction this action on her son's part). Importantly, Volumnia admits that Coriolanus's actions are not without their merit in the sense that he is trying to maintain his honor, telling him that if she was to ask him to turn on the Volsces that would be 'Poisonous of your honor" (Coriolanus, 5.3.135), though of course the manipulative Volumnia fails to mention—for obvious reasons—that it would also be poisonous to Coriolanus's honor to not avenge himself on the Tribunes and people who betrayed and exiled him from Rome in the first place. However, further down in this speech Volumnia alludes not to Roman honor, but to what should be rightfully called Christian honor, rhetorically asking her son "Think'st thou it honorable for a noble man/Still to remember wrongs?" (Coriolanus, 5.3. 154-155). The Roman answer to that question is an absolute and unqualified yes. Part of the essence of the Roman conception of honor is avenging wrongs against oneself and one's rank. It is only coming from a sense of mercy and humility that it can be seen as honorable to forgive and forget wrongs, which is to say in this context only coming from a place of English Christian honor.

The scene ends with an affirmation that Coriolanus has reconciled honor and mercy in a way reminiscent of the English Renaissance thinkers and which is completely at odds with the standard ancient Roman paradigm of honor. Aufidius, in an aside where he gloats that he now has an excuse to assassinate his long-time foe, says "I am glad thou hast set thy mercy and they honor/At difference in thee" (Coriolanus, 5.3.200-201). Of course in a Roman sense it is impossible to set honor and mercy in accord with each other; they are alien concepts. It is only in the Christian sense of the concept that honor and mercy can be reconciled and set not at difference to each other, but as complements to each other. Tragically this reconciliation and transition in Coriolanus from a Roman conception of honor to a Christian conception of honor leads to his immediate downfall, but that downfall only occurs because he was so rigid and Roman in his sense of honor and pride in the first four acts of the play. If Coriolanus had acted with humility earlier on in the play things would not have gone as they did. Ultimately, however, Coriolanus's decision to spare Rome, to spare his family, and to reconcile mercy and honor leads to him having, as Aufidius ends the play affirming, a "noble memory" (Coriolanus, 5.6.152).

In Coriolanus Shakespeare uses the tragic, flawed, and proud, yet ultimately noble, figure of Coriolanus to critique the Roman conception of honor, which saw honor not as virtuous behavior but as social standing and rank, and which breed arrogance and civil war, as the lives of both Coriolanus and Julius Caesar amply demonstrate. In place of this Roman conception of honor Shakespeare both implies and near the end of the play explicitly demonstrates the superiority of the Christian conception of honor which was being developed during the English Renaissance. This English Christian attempt to reconcile the Roman conception of honor as standing in society, pride, and martial valor with the tenets of the Christian faith was not always successful, though Shakespeare demonstrated the best-case scenario of this reconciliation in the person and play of Henry V.

Coriolanus's problems and eventual exile are a direct result of his adherence to the rigid and hierarchical system of Roman honor, a conceptual framework in which honor and glory were finite resources and maintaining social rank and face were of paramount importance. At no point can the actions taken by Coriolanus be criticized as being dishonorable under the Roman conception of honor until he spares Rome. **Ironically it is in sparing Rome that Coriolanus is departing from Roman honor, and in forsaking the destructive tendencies of Roman honor Coriolanus is saving Rome itself.**

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